



EMPLOYER BRANDING CONTEXTUALISED

A qualitative study in Greece during the financial crisis

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Abstract

Problem

Employer branding as a strategy to attract and retain employees (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004) is continuously gaining more popularity among practitioners and academics. However, the conceptualisation and implementation of employer branding in specific contexts is overlooked in the literature (Aggerholm, Andersen & Thomsen, 2011).

Purpose

The purpose of the study is to show how employer branding is influenced by the context in which companies operate. The focus of the study regarding the context has been the values and norms of the Greek society and the current financial crisis.

Method

A qualitative research has been carried out in which data from interviews and a questionnaire of Human Resources professionals in Greece, corporate websites, and material from mass media have been analysed. Data triangulation has been selected to increase the trustworthiness of the study's findings.

Conclusion

The conceptualisation and practice of employer branding are influenced by the context in which companies operate. The companies that implement employer branding in Greece during the financial crisis have as a goal to reduce its effects on their working environments, their brands, and the collaboration with their suppliers. Therefore, the goal of employer branding becomes to increase the employee engagement and to improve the corporate reputation. In order to achieve their goals, the organisational actors mobilise the societal-level principles, values and beliefs appropriate to communicate the employer brand to key stakeholders.

Key words

Employer branding, contextualisation, economic recession, reputation management, employee engagement

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1. Introduction

In recent past, a report created by LinkedIn stated that “Employer branding is the new black” (LinkedIn, 2012) to describe the prominent position that employer branding has for companies as a strategy that aims at *attracting and retaining* employees (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). The growing interest of the industry on employer branding became evident by the increasing resources that companies spend to develop and promote their employer brand (Davies, 2008). Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) had written eleven years ago that a Google search on employer branding generated 3,000 hits; today this number has risen to 4,850,000.

However, many employer branding researchers argue that employer branding has gained more attention in the industry than in the academic circles (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Edwards, 2009; Heilmann, Saarenketo & Likannen: 2013; Love & Singh, 2011). Since the initial development of the concept by Ambler and Barrow (1996), employer branding is spreading and is increasingly introduced to various settings. Therefore, the interest by the academia is crucial in exploring how the concept is understood and practiced in different contexts. Following this logic, the current study is examining how employer branding is conceptualised and practiced in a very specific context, in Greece during the current financial crisis.

1.1 Background

Development of the employer branding concept

Although there are many who define the Human Resources Management (HRM) as a personnel administration function, there is a shift in the mindsets of others towards a more strategic role of the HRM (Boxall & Purcell, 2011; Ulrich, 1997). Boxall and Purcell (2011) stress out the importance of the quality of the human resources for the viability and, at a higher level, the long-term success of the company. Thus, the recruitment and development of the right people in terms of skills and abilities becomes a key operation for the goals of the company. In order for the company to have an effective recruiting strategy, however, it is essential that it is an attractive place to work for prospective applicants so as to increase their number and quality (Boxall & Purcell, 2011).

According to Boxall (1998) the Resource-Based view (RBV) of the company is the link between the HRM and the strategy of the company. According to the RBV of organisations

proposed by Barney (1991), there are three types of resources that could potentially lead to a competitive advantage, namely the physical capital resources, the organisational capital resources, and the human capital resources. In order for the latter to become a source of a sustainable competitive advantage, however, they should fulfil the criteria of the value, rareness, imitability and organisation (VRIO) framework (Barney & Wright, 1998). Ployhart (2006) distinguishes recruiting from selection and claims that it is the key activity that will enable the company to survive and build a sustained competitive advantage.

Employer branding has been developed as a strategy that would facilitate the efforts of the companies to win the so-called ‘War for talent’ (Kuchеров & Zavyalova, 2012; Rampl & Kenning, 2012). In order to identify the recruitment challenges in the 21st century, Ployhart (2006) points out the “demographic, labour, societal, and cultural changes” (p.868) that result in shortages of talents. More specifically, the aging workforce, the tendency of the new generation to change jobs more frequently than the previous ones, and the increased demands for skills as white-collar jobs that are on the rise (Parment & Dyhre, 2009 ; Heilmann et al, 2013) are the most acknowledged facts that will lead to a competition for the skilled employees that will be “as fierce as the competition for customers”(Berthon, Ewing & Hah, 2005, p.167). This view of the employees as customers of the employment offer has led to the application of marketing techniques to the area of HRM (Barrow & Mosley, 2005; Edwards, 2009); as a result, employer branding emerged.

Definitions of the employer branding concept

The first definition of the employer brand remains one of the most popular ones to date. Ambler and Barrow (1996) conceived that the techniques used by the marketing area to make a consumer brand more attractive to the public have an analogy to the HRM field where they aim at making the organisation an attractive employer. Therefore, they have defined the employer brand as “the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company.” (idem, p.8). Edwards (2009) supports that employer branding is an “umbrella program” (p.5) as for its execution a synergy of the marketing and an HR field is essential.

Employer branding is the process of building a unique and identifiable employer identity that aims at differentiating the company from its competitors ((Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). This differentiation is mainly based on the values and the culture that each company is expressing

through the employer brand, and through the internal marketing mechanisms it can create a workforce that is unified under the same values. This is an asset that competitors cannot easily imitate and, thus, the company gains a competitive advantage.

Kuchеров and Zavyalova (2012) also claim that the aim of employer branding is to make the company distinguishable in the labour market by creating a positive image of the company as an employer through the promotion of specific material and non-material advantages. They include the employees (current or potential), the competitors of the company and the intermediate agencies of the labour market as the group of actors that the employer branding strategy is targeted to.

Aggerholm et al (2011) have criticized the previous conceptualizations of employer branding as outdated and claimed that the complexities of the environment in which companies operate today demand another view of employer branding. They do not perceive the latter as a linear process of information transmission from the employer to the employee but rather they see employer branding as a communication between the employer and various stakeholders, as a part of their relation, embedded in the strategic processes that aim at the sustainable development of the organisation. This criticism by Aggerholm et al (2011) indicates that the interest of the research should turn to how organisations implement employer branding as a response to, in many cases, turbulent and complex environments.

Possible outcomes of employer branding

The possible outcomes of a strong employer brand are extensively discussed in the literature and in many cases they reflect the companies' motives and expectations from the implementation of the employer branding strategy. At the internal level of the organisation, the most noted results are the better quality of job applicants (Heilmann, Saarenketo & Likannen, 2013) and the increased employee engagement which results in enhanced employee retention (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Barrow & Mosley, 2006; Heilmann et al, 2013). Consequently, the costs associated with high turnover and recruitment are decreased (Barrow & Mosley, 2006; Heilmann et al, 2013). Moreover, a number of researchers argue that a strong employer brand results in lower rates of absenteeism due to higher degree of employee engagement (Barrow & Mosley, 2006). Regarding the costs, some researchers have indicated that people would work for a company with a strong employer brand with lower salary than they would agree to work for in a company with a weak employer brand (Berthon

et al, 2005; Heilmann et al, 2013). Additionally, when the employer brand values are systematically communicated to the employees, then the latter will be unified to a greater extent under the same culture (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). As the employees identify themselves with the organisational culture, they display the latter during the interpersonal interaction with the customers, offering them a distinctive customer experience (Mosley, 2007) that results in the increase of the consumers' satisfaction (Barrow & Mosley, 2005). This is in accordance to the internal marketing concept which indicates that the company operates not only on the consumer market but in the job market as well (Wilden, Gudergan & Lings, 2010).

1.2 Problematisation

Although various researchers support that the need for employer branding is recognised by the industry (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Davies, 2008) there is a significant lack of knowledge regarding how employer branding is perceived in countries that adopted the strategic practices of HRM by importing them from the countries that created and developed them first. More specifically, this lack of knowledge is identified also in the case of Greece where Myloni, Harzing and Mirza (2004) claim that HRM is underexplored. This gap in the literature has been a criterion in this study for choosing exclusively companies that operate in Greece in order to enhance our understanding of employer branding as an example of a strategy adopted by organisations in different settings than the ones studied in the literature.

Despite the fact that the interest on employer branding is growing in the academia as well, there has not been paid enough attention to the design and implementation of employer branding in different contexts. Aggerholm et al (2011) argue that the societal context has an effect on the nature of employer branding and to the way it is implemented. For example, they state that what is prioritized by the employees, current and future, in times of prosperity might not be the main focus in times of crisis. In that context, organisations must reflect and adapt to the possible challenges that may occur such as changes in the nature and demands of the psychological contract (Katou, 2013). Therefore, this shortage of studies on how HRM and more specifically employer branding may respond to these challenges has been another reason for conducting the current study.

Greek companies are an appropriate setting for this research due to the specific circumstances under which they operate. Since the beginning of the Greek financial crisis in 2008, a number of austerity measures were taken as a part of the government's agreement with the European Union, the International Monetary Fund, and the European Central Bank in exchange for economic aid. Due to the austerity measures, however, the economic life in the country faced a deep recession; among other consequences, the majority of the companies watched a decline in their profits and in turn had to proceed in measures such as downsizing or cutting of wages so as to survive. As a result, the rate of unemployment at the third semester of 2014 was 25.5% (statistics.gr, 2015) while in 2014 the General Gross Debt reached to 177.1% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Eurostat, 2015). One of the consequences of the high unemployment is the phenomenon of the so-called brain drain which is estimated to approximately 200.000 young people that have migrated in 5 years (ICAP Group, 2015). Another consequence of the high unemployment is that the job supply is on higher levels than demand and thus the companies do not expect difficulties in attracting new employees (ALBA , 2014) Therefore, employer branding may not be needed to serve its traditional goal to attract employees and the strategy's possible other purposes need to be explored.

1.3 Objectives and research questions

The objective of this study is dual; to show how employer branding is thought of by companies in a country that has imported HRM from different settings and also to provide an understanding of how the context influences the employer branding work. For that purpose the focus of the study has been employer branding in one of the biggest industries in Greece (i.e. the Food and Beverages sector) during the financial crisis. Thus the research questions that have to be answered are:

- How is employer branding conceptualised by HR professionals in Greece?
- How does the context influence the conceptualisation and practice of employer branding?

1.4 Disposition

First of all, previous studies related to the subject are presented. Further on, the theoretical influences of the study are described, namely the concept of the translation of ideas and the institutional logics perspective. The research approach is explained afterwards while its limitations are recognised alongside with the ethical issues taken into consideration during the

research. Finally, the findings of the research are presented and analysed through the lens of the study's theoretical influences and in comparison with previous studies. The analysis is followed by the "Discussion" section where the research findings are presented. Finally, the practical and theoretical implications of the study are described along with the conclusions of the study.

2. Previous research and theoretical influences

2.1 Previous studies

HRM in Greece

A number of studies indicate that HRM practices and especially those related to the "softer" aspects of HRM are highly sensitive on cultural influences. Based on those studies, Myloni et al (2004) investigated whether the characteristics of HRM in Greece are influenced by the national culture or if they are following the international standards. For that purpose, they have compared the HRM practices followed by Greek firms with the practices implemented by subsidiaries of multinationals (MNCs) in Greece and they concluded that not only Greek companies are highly influenced by the cultural and societal environment but also MNCs had adapted to a significant extend to the imperatives of the cultural context in which they operate, although the HRM practices found in MNCs are more structured. For example, the results of the study have shown that the high level of in-group/family collectivism that characterises the Greek society impacts the way selection and recruitment are handled (idem). Accordingly, the current study focuses on how institutions influence one of the HRM practices in Greece (i.e. employer branding).

HRM during the crisis

Wicramasinghe and Perera (2012) have studied the HRM practices implemented in Sri Lanka during the recession time of 2008-2010 and their consequences on the happiness of employees. Although their results vary according to the size of the firm, they concluded that during the crisis firms reduced the financial rewards and benefits, and the investments on the training and development of the employees. Nevertheless, the companies kept in satisfactory levels for the happiness of the employees the communication of corporate information and the performance management systems.

Smith and Abdullah (2004) investigated how HRM responded to the challenges raised by the Asian economic crisis in 1997-1998 in Malaysia. They have concluded that the HRM practices implemented in the companies were so significant that they became one of the factors that led to the changes necessary for the country to respond to the crisis. Additionally, they have found that the cultural background of the employees drove them to trust and follow the HR managers who decided those practices, and for that reason the practices were implemented successfully.

In a longitudinal study on the practices of the best 101 best Slovenian employers during the financial crisis, Brenčič, Pfajfar and Rašković (2012) showed that various organisational processes need to adapt to the new circumstances so that high levels of organisational performance to be maintained. They found that the financial crisis changed the values of the companies' various stakeholders and has created discrepancy in the trust towards the companies. Therefore, the companies responded by focusing on the establishment of trustworthy and robust relationships with their customers and employees through marketing and HRM practices respectively. The study has concluded that marketing and HRM were highly ranked in terms of how much they developed and changed during the crisis in Slovenia. This change derived from a new conceptualisation of the external marketing which is related to the customers and the internal marketing which is related to the employees of the companies (idem).

More specifically, employer branding has been one of the HRM practices that changed significantly during the financial crisis. Martin, Gollan & Grigg (2011) claimed that until the beginning of the global financial crisis in 2007-2008 employer branding was implemented mainly to attract new and qualified employees and therefore it was related to a great extent with marketing practices. Even the internal employer branding aimed at creating satisfied employees that would be representative of the corporate culture to the customers and that would be ambassadors of the employer brand to job applicants. However, in the countries that were affected by the financial crisis the goal of employer branding has changed and the practice is implemented more to increase the engagement of the current employees and, through it, to improve the corporate reputation (idem).

Employer branding and reputation management

Some scholars indicate that there is a missing link between the field of HRM and the field of corporate reputation management which is mainly seen as related to marketing and communications. Martin (2009) examined the contribution of HRM practices to the corporate reputation and has concluded that the latter is “driven from the inside” (p.232), meaning that the practices that increase the levels of employee engagement have a positive impact on the quality of the corporate reputation. This impact can be even greater in the cases where the HR professionals are aligned with other specialists such as marketing and public relations professionals into enhancing the corporate reputation.

Following the same arguments, Martin et al (2011) have defined employer branding as “a generalised recognition for being known among key stakeholders for providing a high quality employment experience, and a distinctive organisational identity which employees value, engage with and feel confident and happy to promote to others” (p.3618). Similarly, Raithel, Wilczynski, Schloderer, and Schaiger (2010) have claimed that a firm can have multiple reputations to describe how different stakeholders have other views of the company and thus use different criteria to evaluate its reputation. They have also concluded that reputation management that does not rely solely on the financial attributes of a company but on softer drives such as the quality of the employer brand can be much more promising.

The studies described above are examples of how the practice of HRM was influenced in cases of economic recession and, at the same time, how companies used HRM practices to overcome the difficulties of operating in a corresponding context. Therefore, these studies are treated as sources of inspiration for the current study which focuses on the case of the financial crisis in Greece and its influence on employer branding.

2.2 Theoretical influences

The analysis of the research findings was realised with the use of the concept of the translation of ideas and the institutional logics perspective. These two analytical tools facilitated the exploration of how employer branding is thought of in Greece and how the institutional context influenced this conceptualization. In this section the two theories are presented separately and in the last part of the section they are combined in one model

(Waldorff, 2013). Finally, the choice of this model as the analytical tool of this study is explained.

Scandinavian Institutionalism

This study is influenced by the Scandinavian institutionalism which is related to the neo-institutionalism and the work of Powel and DiMaggio (1991). However, Scandinavian institutionalists theorise on the issue of change differently and support that change in organisational life is a norm as much as is stability. In fact, Czarniawska and Joerges (1996) understand organisational change as “a story of ideas turning into actions in ever new localities” (p.13). Change takes place when ideas travel as they are dis-embedded from their space and time and re-embedded in another setting where they are translated, materialised and enacted, and if they are found successful they become institutionalised. And from there they are again being dis-embedded to be found in another time and space and continue their journey. Therefore, Scandinavian institutionalism is useful for this study because it enables the description and understanding of the translation process of employer branding in the companies that operate in Greece.

Translation process

In order to describe how ideas spread among individuals and organisations, Scandinavian institutionalists rejected the term “diffusion” and used the notion of translation as more eloquent to describe how ideas move from one person, or group of persons, to another and at the same time how they are transformed (Czarniawska & Sevón, 1996). As Czarniawska and Joerges (1996) exemplify, although a text can be seen as an object, it can be interpreted in various ways by different readers. In the same sense, people translate ideas according to their own sense-making processes and put them in use for their own or else’s interest.

Organisational actors come across many ideas but choose to pay attention only to those that they seem familiar to some extent and correspond to the purposes of the organisation (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996). Although the circumstances under which an idea, practice or model drew the attention of organisational actors are not usually known, the reasons of their attractiveness are important. More specifically, organisations tend to compare themselves with other organisations that are similar and are perceived to be successful and imitate those practices that are thought to have led to this success (Sahlin-Andersson, 1996). However, the practices that the imitating organisation adopts are not exactly the same that are found in the

imitated organisation but rather they are the organisational actors' translations of these practices. The characteristics of the practices that are related to the context where they are traced are not taken into consideration and therefore the imitated model becomes a "context-free prototype" (Sahlin-Andersson, 1996, p.80). As a consequence, what is being imitated is not passively adopted by the new organisation but it is adapted (edited) to the new circumstances by active editors as shown by empirical studies (Morris and Lancaster, 2005).

Nevertheless, this editing process is bound by specific rules (Sahlin-Andersson, 1996). The first editing rule is related to the context as the transferred models are acquiring the attributes of the new context. Further on, the editing rule regarding formulation implies that the way a model is presented and labelled influences the degree to which it will draw attention and therefore it will move from place to place to a greater degree. The prerequisite is that the model has to be presented in a way that it will evoke familiarity and at the same time to be considered as a novelty. The third editing rule supports the rationality of the new model meaning that the logic behind its adoption by the organisation must be clear. In other words, the actions that have to be performed and the result that they will produce must be explicit (idem). For example, Morris and Lancaster (2005) have shown that the process of translating the lean methodology into working practices for the construction industry has been characterised by the application of the three editing rules, although in varying degrees.

Ideas that have been translated become quasi-objects and then they are turned into objects, in other words, they are materialised (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996). One step in this process is that ideas are transformed to a linguistic artefact such as text or metaphor. In general, language is decisive for the translation process as organisational actors (managers, gurus, and consultants) interact at a micro-level and these conversations influence the translation process (Mueller & Whittle, 2011). Further on, through a series of repetitions of these artefacts, label of ideas are created and, thus, ideas gradually gain a position inside the organisation. Ideas can be objectified in other ways as well, for example through a design or model.

In order for ideas to be put in action, an image of action through verbal or schematic expression must be initially created (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996). Then the decision for action has to be infused with positive meanings for example for the action's consequences so as to be proceeded with its realisation. The next step is the creation of further elaborated plans of action before the idea is finally put into action and be materialised.

After the idea has been objectified and embedded in the new organisation, it continues to travel. The ideas that are considered more useful or more impressive among similar organisations become fashionable and thus they are tried out more often by other members of this cohort. And while the ideas dictated by fashion are translated in multiple settings, they are altered each time they travel and at the same time these new variations are further reproduced. Finally, as old and new ideas are tried out by organisations, those that will be decided to be kept in the long term become institutionalised.

Institutional logics

Institutional logics are ‘the socially constructed, historical patterns of material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs and rules by which individuals produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organize time and space, and provide meaning to their social reality’ (Thornton & Ocasio, 1999, p. 804). Thornton Ocasio, and Lounsbury (2012) have acknowledged that today there are seven societal level logics , namely state, community, family, religion (nonmarket logics) and professional, corporate, and market (Table 1). Although on a societal level, these institutional logics are represented by individuals and pervade organisations and fields (Besharov & Smith, 2014).

The introduction of the Institutional logics theoretical approach was first made by Friedland and Alford (1991) in an essay that was part of a book on institutionalism edited by DiMaggio and Powel (1991). The latter had already gained a prominent position among institutional scholars with their theory of organisational isomorphism which dictated that the motives of organisations are to gain legitimacy in the environment in which they operate.

However, Friedland and Alford (1991) criticised the existing institutional theory as inadequate because it examined organisations in a bubble, without taking into consideration the effects of the institutional and social context in which organisations operate. The authors proposed that there should be three levels of analysis, namely the individuals, the organisations, and institutions. Moreover, they argued that “to explain institutionalism, we must rethink the meaning of institutions” (Friedland & Alford, 1991, p. 247). They defined institutions as the guides of the human activities and they conceived both in terms of the material practices that humans follow and the symbolic aspect that provides sense and meaning to those practices. Further on, they recognised the capitalist market, the bureaucratic

state, democracy, the nuclear family, and Christian religion as the institutions that form the basis of the Western society. These institutions have their foundations and are organised around a central logic which is defined “as a set of material practices and symbolic constructions”. (idem, p. 248). The actions and behaviour of individuals and organisations is characterized and controlled by the often competing institutional logics and, at the same time, different actors shape and use them to their own interest

Institutional logics		
Market logics	Market	Competition is not subjected to regulations, the success is defined by the preferences of the consumers
	Profession	The organisation and the standards of work are projections of the demands of a professional group
	Corporation	The decisions regarding the organisation of work are taken by managers in a rationalistic way
Non market logics	State	The various activities of organisations and individuals are under the control of the law and the state
	Family	The decisions and actions of individuals is determined by loyalty to the other members included in the family
	Community	Individuals or organisations feel committed to a certain community because they share common identity and interests
	Religion	Individuals perceive of reality and take decisions based on an unconditional faith and through various symbolisms

Table 1. Institutional logics (*Sources:* Friedland & Alford, 1991; Goodrick & Reay, 2011; Lee & Lounsbury, 2015)

Since the time that Friedland and Alford first placed the seed for the institutional logics approach, many have paid attention to the new theory and developed it to a significant degree. Although Friedland and Alford (1991) examined how the societal context affects individuals and organisations, the development of the institutional logics approach has transformed it to a metatheory (Thornton and Ocasio, 2008) that has been applied to diverse empirical studies and at different levels and the term has become a “buzz word”(p.99).

Due to the fact that the number of institutional logics is rather large and there is frequently some incompatibility between them in terms of their goals and the way to achieve them, organisations face institutional complexity (Greenwood, Raynard, Kodeih, Micelotta & Lounsbury, 2011). According to Waldorff, Reay and Goodrick (2013) there are different streams of thought in the literature on how organisations cope with institutional complexity. A review of the institutional logics literature conducted for the current study revealed that these streams are five.

The first stream supports that there is one dominant logic that orders action and provides meaning in each field. For example, Thornton and Ocasio (1999) performed an industry-level analysis in higher education publishing and concluded that the passing through from the editorial to the market logic had an effect on executive power and succession.

A second stream, however, claims that institutional complexity may not be a temporary situation and various institutional logics may coexist in a field for longer periods of time (Voronov, De Clercq & Hinings, 2013). Arman, Liff and Wikström (2014) have concluded that the managerial institutional logic has more power over the competing professional institutional logic in Swedish healthcare organisations. Despite the fact that the relationship between the two logics is mediated by the process of hierarchization and there is imbalance in the power between them as the managerial logic has more influence on practices over the professional logic; nevertheless, both logics affect the actions of the actors.

A third group of institutional theorists has shown that organisations adhere to multiple coexisting but still competing logics depending on the context and the actors involved. Reay and Hinings (2009) have examined the competing institutional logics found at the micro level in a health care system e.g. the business-like health care introduced by the government and the dominant logic of medical professionalism among physicians. They discovered that although none of the two logics was dominant, different actors managed to operate efficiently through the mechanism of pragmatic collaboration and due to their unity under the same goals. Greenwood, Diaz, Li and Lorente (2010) however have explored the influence that non-market logics, namely family and state, have on the market practices of Spanish organisations, depending on the institutional complexity found in each region that the organisations operated. Voronov et al (2013) conducted a study of a fine wine industry where actors engage to both the aesthetic and market logics although to a different degree depending

on the situation and the audience group. For example, the aesthetic logic prevailed during the wineries' communication with wine critics while the market logic characterised the relationships with the wine distributors.

The fourth stream of research has focused on hybrid organisations and has shown how they deal with institutional complexity by combining elements of different logics (Pache & Santos, 2013). For example, Pache and Santos (2013) have shown the need for legitimacy has driven social enterprises to mix the commercial logic with elements of the social welfare logic through the process of selective coupling. In a similar study, Battilana and Dorado (2010) have indicated that the creation of a strong organisational identity works as an umbrella under which different institutional logics are able to coexist without leading to conflictual situations among the organisation's members.

Finally, Goodrick and Reay (2011) have taken one step further in the theorizing of the relationships between institutional logics. They have chosen to examine how different institutional logics affect the practices of a single profession and they have acknowledged that they are not only competitive but also collaborative in many occasions. They used the term *constellations of logics* to describe not only institutional logics that coexist through different mechanisms as in the cases mentioned above but in essence to define the "combination of institutional logics guiding behaviour at any point of time" (idem, p.399). Based on the same concept, Waldorff, Reay and Goodrick (2013) have explored further the relationship among logics and how they impact action. They compared two different settings and have found that the relationships among logics in the constellation both enable and constrain action. For example, they have shown that if one logic is followed by many actors then action is constrained because the decisions for action are limited by that particular logic. On the other hand, if alternative logics are enhancing each other then there is room for more action, and action is enabled.

How logics shape organisational action

Thornton and Ocasio (2008) have identified four mechanisms through which institutional logics shape the actions of organisations. To begin with, the collective identities established among groups at the organisational level, for example in the industry associations, and the identification of the organisations with the institutional logics of this group, lead the organisational action accordingly. Moreover, institutional logics characterise the structures of

power and authority in organisations as they “create the rules of the game” (idem, p.112). The third mechanism that affects organisational action is classification and categorization as they are formed and structured on the basis of specific institutional logics. Finally, institutional logics direct the attention of the organisations to specific phenomena and situations and also provide them the guidelines of response and solution to these phenomena.

Greenwood et al (2011) however claim that, as organisations differ, institutional complexity does not affect all of them to the same extent or in the same way. The characteristics of each organisation act as the filters through which institutional logics pass through and thus the action of each organisation is affected by them accordingly. These attributes are the organisation’s position in the field, the internal structure that allows specific individuals and groups to take decisions according to their interpretations, the form of ownership and the power relations in the organisation, and the organisational identity.

Combination of the two theories and connection to the purpose of the study

Waldorff (2013) emphasizes that there has not been paid enough attention in the literature on how translation processes are influenced by institutional logics (Figure 1). In other words, there should be paid more consideration on how the overarching belief systems found in a specific context influence how an idea is interpreted and materialised in that context. For example, Waldorff (2013) examined how a centrally introduced concept in the healthcare system of Denmark was translated in different ways by various municipalities due to the mobilisation of different constellations of logics in each municipality.

Drawing from Aggerholm et al (2011), the aim of this study is to illustrate that the conceptualisation and practice of employer branding are not universally similar but they are influenced by the context. Therefore, the combination of the two theories proposed by Waldorff (2013) is a fruitful tool in the analysis of the study’s findings. On the one hand, Scandinavian institutionalism provides the framework that enhances the understanding of how and why employer branding was introduced, translated, objectified, and enacted in Greece. On the other hand, the institutional logics perspective shows how the organisational behaviour has been influenced by the institutional environment (Lee & Lounsbury, 2015), in other words, how the process of translation of employer branding has been influenced by the institutional context (Figure 1).

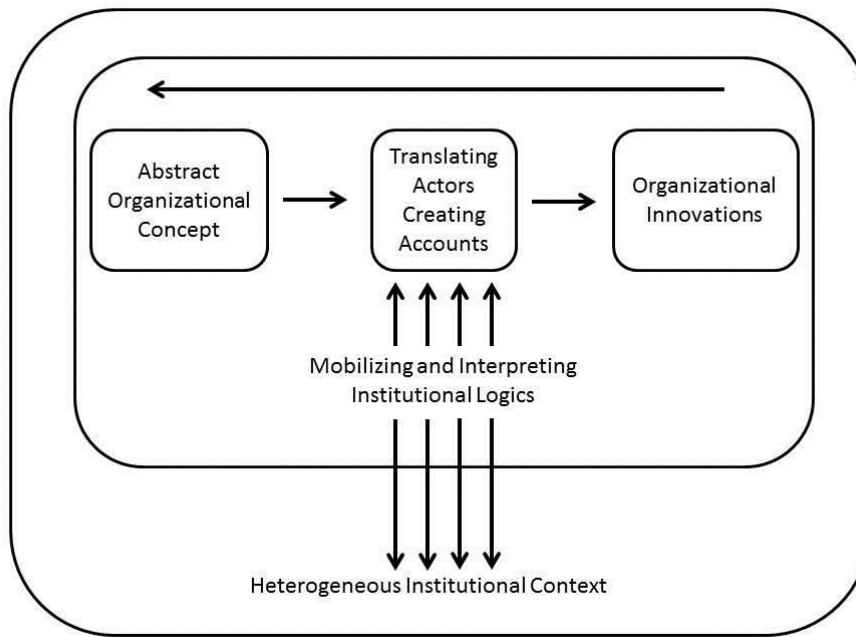


Figure 1. Translation model-actors translating an organisational concept into organisational innovation mobilizing constellations of institutional logics. (Source: Waldorff, 2013, p.231)

3. Research approach

The purpose of this study is to illustrate how employer branding is conceptualized and managed in a different cultural and economic setting than those discussed in the earlier studies. For this purpose, a qualitative research approach has been selected as the most appropriate to provide a deeper understanding and a robust illustration of the subject.

According to Hakim (2000), qualitative research is more common in cases where the demand is for “description and explanation” (p.37). Moreover, the qualitative approach is considered more useful when investigating phenomena that have not been adequately studied in the past (Creswell, 2014) as in the present case.

Creswell (2014) suggests that a research approach consists of three parts, namely the *philosophical worldviews* that drive the research, the *research design* that indicates the procedures followed, and the *research methods* which include the data collection, the data analysis and the validation of the research findings. These three parts are presented below while the current research is positioned in this framework.

3.1 Philosophical worldviews

The current research has its foundations on the assumptions of the broader interpretivist research paradigm. Being at the other extreme of positivism, interpretivism emerged as a guide to research that examines the social phenomena in relation to their context, the cultural and historical reality that surrounds and formulates them (Collis & Hussey, 2014; Crotty, 1998). Therefore, the goal of research is to obtain the meaning of social phenomena and not to predict them, to understand and not to measure; thus, the qualitative data and analysis are more relevant to this paradigm.

3.2 Research design

The main focus of this study is how organisational actors understand employer branding and how the way they practice it has been influenced by specific circumstances, in this case the financial crisis. The qualitative research design fits the purpose of the study as qualitative research provides “richly descriptive reports of individuals’ perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, views and feelings, the meanings and interpretations given to events and things, as well as their behaviour.” (Hakim, 2000, p.34).

Inspired from Aggerholm et al (2011), this study complements more normative studies on employer branding and aims to enhance the knowledge of how the context influences the conceptualisation and practice of employer branding. Due to the lack of previous similar studies, the current research design is exploratory. According to the typology suggested by Collis and Hussey (2014), exploratory research is needed in such cases of knowledge scarcity and the aim of the research is to create awareness on the subject and lead to further and more elaborative studies.

Finally, the current research involves various sources of data, namely in-depth interviews and questionnaire, websites, and mass media. The use of multiple sources of data, called data triangulation (Collis & Hussey, 2014), has been selected as a research tactic that leads to more comprehensive results and increases the richness and validity of the research findings (Creswell, 2014; Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 1996).

3.3 Research methods

Data collection

As mentioned above, the research strategy of this study was data triangulation and therefore the data used have derived from different sources and have been collected with different methods.

Interviews

The interviews have been chosen as a method of data collection because they enabled a deeper understanding on the HR managers' perception on employer branding, which are their motives, and how they practice employer branding.

The interviews took place during the spring of 2015. In total, five Greek HR professionals participated in the current research, four of them provided personal interviews to the author and one answered a questionnaire in written form (Table 2). The interviewees were given the choice between the interview and the questionnaire following the same structure as the interviews. This choice was provided for the interviewees' convenience since the questionnaire allowed more flexibility in terms of conduct time. The average duration of the interviews was 35 minutes, they were all conducted through telephone and the language used was Greek in all cases. The interviews were all recorded and transcribed in order for the coding process to be realised (described below). Also, notes were taken during the interviews so as to facilitate the interviewer's efforts to formulate follow-up questions and address earlier points mentioned by the interviewee if needed (Charmaz, 2006).

Company	Industry	Position	Participation
Company A	Food	HR Director	Questionnaire
Company B	Food	HR Director	Interview
Company C	Food	Recruiter	Interview
Company D	Food	HR Director	Interview
Company E	Beverages	Recruiter	Interview

Table 2. List of companies and interviewees

In order for the participants to be encouraged to reflect deeper on the questions and to feel comfortable enough to drive the interview according to their perspectives (Cassell, 2015) the interviews were semi-structured. The interview guide starts with classification questions (job title and tenure in the company) while the rest of the questions were open in order to explore their opinions and experiences and closed in order to obtain information on how employer branding is managed (Appendix 1). Finally, according to Collis and Hussey (2014) proposed interview design for studies that fall under interpretivism, there were many clarification questions (*probes*) asked besides the ones included in the initial set of questions as well as some company-specific questions which are not included in the appendix so as to protect the anonymity of the companies. For example, some of the companies participated in the “Best Workplaces Hellas” contest organized in Greece (www.greatplacetowork.gr). During the interviews with the HR professionals from these companies, the interviewer used the participation to this contest as an example to understand various aspects of the subject (e.g. the practice of employer branding or the related decision-making processes).

The criteria for the choice of companies that would participate was their size as larger companies were thought to implement employer branding in a more structured way, and their presence and fame as employers in the Greek society. From the beginning of the research and throughout the whole process, HR professionals from twenty eight companies in the Food and Beverages sector have been contacted by the researcher through telephone, e-mail or their personal accounts on LinkedIn and five of them agreed or were available to participate in the research. Most of the HR professionals that did not participate in the study claimed that they were not available due to lack of time which in some cases was attributed to the high levels of workload caused by the financial crisis. For example, two large companies of the Beverages sector were in the process of merging when the study was carried out and, thus, the HR professionals from both companies were not available.

Four of the HR professionals that agreed to participate in the study were initially contacted through telephone and one through LinkedIn. In the first case, the researcher contacted the HR departments of the companies and after the purpose of the study was explained, the researcher was redirected to the participants because they were the most relevant and involved in employer branding in the respective departments and therefore more appropriate to participate in the study. In the second case, the researcher contacted the participant through

LinkedIn on the basis of the position in the company and the activities involved, as described in the participant's LinkedIn profile.

Websites

According, to the ALBA report (2014), corporate websites are one of the main channels to attract employees in Greece. The analysis of their content has provided a general picture on the industry regarding which companies aim to promote their employer brand and how they promote it. Most importantly, the messages that are projected indicate the motives and the needs of the companies.

In total, the websites of 37 large companies from the Food and Beverages sector in Greece have been investigated during March 2015. Most of these companies have a section in their websites that concerns their human resources and their working environment. In many cases this section can be found under the title “Our people” or “Our working environment” and is the main part that promotes their employer brand. Out of the 37 companies investigated, 23 corporate websites had some or extensive reference to the employees and the working environment (Appendix 2) and 14 did not have any reference regarding either the employees or the working environment or something else that could be interpreted as a promotion of their employer brand. Instead, they focused on the characteristics and the quality of their products. Finally, the websites of subsidiaries of multinational companies that redirected the user to the website of the parent company have not been taken into consideration as they were not considered to be representative of employer branding in Greece.

Mass media

The mass media material provided additional information from various companies in the industry. Most of the material includes interviews or statements of HR managers and CEOs and therefore they were useful for the current study since they revealed how employer branding is translated in these companies and why it is translated in a certain manner.

The data used for this study that come from mass media have been selected after a long and thorough investigation and include newspaper articles, videos and magazine articles (Appendix 3). This investigation included general searches on Google and YouTube with the use of key words such as “employer branding”, “attractiveness of the employer”, and “employee engagement”. A more systematic research has been conducted on all the issues of

the business magazines “People Edge” and “Manager”. The criteria for the selection of the data are two, namely their relevance to the subject, in other words, they had to include information on how employer branding is conceived of and practiced in the Food and Beverages industry and their position in time, meaning they had to be dated in the time span since the beginning of the financial crisis in Greece in 2008.

Case industry

The Food and Beverages sector has been chosen for this study because it is the biggest employer of the Greek manufacturing industry (IOBE report, 2013) and, thus, it plays an important role for the Greek economy. In this sense, the practices followed in this sector may have an influence on other sectors of the Greek economy. Especially the largest companies of the Food and Beverages sector that implement employer branding may be perceived as editors of the concept and role models for other companies and sectors.

According to the report conducted by the Foundation for Economic and Industrial Research (IOBE, 2014) with the collaboration of the Greek Food and Beverage Industry Association (SEVT), the Food and Beverages industry in Greece plays a leading role in the country’s economic life and it has the possibility to be a basic element of economic growth for the country. The Food and Beverages industry in Greece has the first position in terms of the gross production value (20, 4%), and the gross value added (19, 7%), and second in turnover (20, 2%) among the other sectors of manufacturing. Moreover, the 18, 9% of the total business operating in the Greek manufacturing sector is in the Food and Beverages industry (idem).

According to the SEVT webpage (2015) the number of companies that are operating in the Food and Beverages Industry are 1248. However, according to the IOBE report (2014) 95% of these in the Food industry and 90% in the Beverages industry are small companies (under 49 employees). There are approximately 115 thousands of employees in the Food and Beverages Industry (IOBE, 2014). To be more specific, in the Food industry, 37% of them are in small companies (under 49 employees), 20% are in big companies (50-249 employees), and 27% are in very big companies (over 250 employees). Nevertheless, in the Beverage industry almost half of the employees (48%) are employed in very big companies and 23% in big companies (idem). While the employment in manufacturing has decreased with a rate of

37.5% during the period 2008-2013, in the Food and Beverage sector the total change in the number of employees is only 2, 9%.

Data analysis

The interviews conducted by the researcher and the parts of the interviews found in the mass media that were relative to employer branding have been transcribed so that all data would be gathered in written form. The analysis of the data has been made according to the process indicated by Charmaz (2006) for qualitative coding and it was conducted in two phases. The first step was an initial line-by-line coding which revealed categories and reduced the amount of data. The second phase was focused coding during which the most frequent or important codes related to the various aspects of employer branding were compared and summarized in new categories. For example, the initial coding on one transcribed interview resulted into three themes: “communicating with employees”, “informing employees first”, and “sending internal newsletters”. At the second phase, these codes have been summarized in the category “keeping the employees updated”. However, this procedure was differentiated for the texts that were too short, such as some of the texts found in the corporate websites, as there was only one phase of coding and the results were considered as categories.

The categories of data that derived from the coding process were interpreted through the lens of institutional logics and translation theory and the influence that one exerts on the other (Waldorff, 2013). In the “analysis” section the data are presented along with their analysis based on the theoretical influences of the study and on the related previous studies mentioned above. In some occasions the analysis is complemented with quotes from the interviews that aim at making the description more vivid along with codes that allow the identification of the corresponding interview (Appendix 4).

Trustworthiness

Qualitative research has often been criticized for lack of objectivity, for non-replicability, for issues regarding generalizability, and for lack of transparency (Bryman, 2008). In order to overcome to a certain extent these challenges and to compensate for the research limitations mentioned below, certain research strategies that increase the study’s trustworthiness have been deployed. Trustworthiness is proposed by Bryman and Bell (2007) as a standard for evaluating qualitative research. In order for a study to be trustworthy, four criteria must be fulfilled, namely credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Taking into consideration these four criteria proposed by Bryman and Bell (2007) this study has aimed to fulfil them. To begin with, multiple sources of data have been used in this study in order to achieve credibility through data triangulation. Moreover, rich descriptions of the research design and the findings have been provided so that other researchers will be able to evaluate the possible transferability to other contexts. Dependability as the equivalent of reliability found in quantitative research (Bryman & Bell, 2007), has been improved by taking into consideration the suggestions of Gibbs (2007) meaning that the transcriptions have been examined thoroughly for mistakes, efforts for consistent coding have been made, and the process of the research has been recorded and presented. Finally, the issue of confirmability has been addressed, as the researcher has put efforts not to be influenced by personal values throughout the whole process of the research and the analysis of the findings.

3.4 Limitations

The research approach described above presents certain limitations. First of all, the geographical distance to the interviewees did not allow face-to-face interviews or on site observations to be carried out that would enhance the understanding of the practice of employer branding. However, the fact that the author comes from the same cultural background facilitates the comprehension of the phenomena described in the interviews. Moreover, the participation in the study was lower than designed initially which would provide data from more companies and thus a clearer picture of how they deal with employer branding. This shortage of participants has been compensated with the triangulation of data.

Another issue with all three categories of data used in the research is the matter of language as all data were in Greek but were codified and analysed in English and the language difference raises issues of validity regarding the expression of meaning, especially in qualitative research (Van Nes, Abma, Johnsson, & Deeg, 2010). For example, some companies use the term employer branding in English while others use Greek terms that describe the concept. However, as the researcher shares the native language and cultural background with the participants of the study, the interpretation of the data was made in a way that their meaning would not be altered and it would be comprehensible by the reader. Moreover, coding a Greek text in English had a positive effect on the researcher's understanding of the data. Tarozzi (2013) claims that coding in another language can be perceived as an instrument of analysis

because the researcher must reflect on the data in an analytical manner, and this process allows new insights.

Nevertheless, in the qualitative studies the subjectivity of the results is in most cases an issue as they reflect the researcher's beliefs, values, and perceptions (Bryman & Bell, 2007). In addition, the findings of a qualitative study are associated with the specific context of the phenomena in question, as they are in the current study the institutional and historical (the financial crisis) settings and therefore they are not generalizable to other cases. In that sense, the findings of this study are not appropriate to characterise employer branding in another country or sector. However, a thick description of the research methods and of the findings may enable some reflections to similar settings as well.

3.5 Ethical considerations

Research must comply with specific moral principles throughout the whole process so as to be ethical. The current research has taken into account the four ethical claims set by the Swedish Council of Scientific Research (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002) which are the information requirement, the informed consent requirement, the confidentiality and anonymity requirement, and the utilisation requirement.

First of all, the information requirement has been fulfilled as the participants were informed about the identity of the researcher and the purpose of the study. The participants were also informed about the procedure that needed to be followed for their participation such as the duration of the interview, the way of communication, and the number of questions that would be asked. More specifically, the participants were given the choice of the time when the interview would be carried out and the alternative to participate by answering a questionnaire in case that would suit their schedule or preferences better. They were also asked to give their permission for the recording of the interviews after they were informed that only the researcher would have access to them. Being aware of all these parameters of the research, the interviewees agreed to participate and thus the informed consent requirement has also been satisfied. The third requirement fulfilled is regarding the confidentiality of the interview data and the anonymity of the interviewees. Throughout the whole process of the study the identity of the participants was not revealed and at the final document of the study measures were taken so as the identity of the participants or the companies in which they are employed to not be possible to be inferred. For example, the names of the companies or their exact size in

number of employees are not revealed. Moreover, the archives where the interview recordings or transcriptions are stored were protected so as no one except for the researcher could have access to them. Finally, the utilization requirement has also been established as the data from the interviews have only been and will only be used for the purposes of this study.

4. Findings

In this section, the findings of the study are presented and analysed through the prism of Scandinavian Institutionalism and the concept of institutional logics. The process of an idea translation provides insights on the way ideas or models spread among organisations and are transformed by them when they are put into action (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996). However, meaning creation processes such as translation are influenced by the overarching principles i.e. the institutional logics that characterize and guide a given society (Waldorff, 2013).

The findings of this study suggest that the institutional logics found in Greece have played an important role in the translation of employer branding. In brief, employer branding is implemented in the industry researched because its companies have three main goals: to maintain or increase the engagement of their employees, to improve the corporate reputation, and, to a lower degree, to attract prospective employees. Consequently, employer branding is targeted to four groups related to the company, namely the employees, the prospective employees, the customers, and the suppliers. According to the findings analysed below three different institutional logics are deployed when companies promote their employer brand to these groups which means that there is flexibility in the enactment of employer branding depending each time on the audience (Voronov et al, 2013). More specifically the logics that are mobilized are the family logic, the community logic, and the market logic (Goodrick & Reay, 2011; Fairclough & Micelotta, 2013; Lee & Lounsbury, 2015).

At the first part of the analysis below, the introduction and translation of employer branding in the Greek companies are briefly presented. Further on, a more elaborative description of how the three institutional logics influenced the translation, materialization, and enactment of employer branding for each of the audiences separately follows. The segmentation of the employer branding audiences will lead to the understanding of how the concept is conceptualised and practiced in Greece.

4.1 The travel of the idea

Introduction and translation of employer branding

In a world full of ideas circulating in time and space, a specific idea can be introduced to an organisation if given organisational actors are first informed about it (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996). Nevertheless, the exact moment and space that companies in Greece were informed about the concept of employer branding is undefined for the respondents of the current research. This gap in the story of how the idea of employer branding travelled into the specific context is identified by Czarniawska and Joerges (1996) as a natural phenomenon. They claimed that what is important instead is the reason an idea becomes attractive to given organisational actors and not how they were informed about it.

According to Sahlin-Andersson (1996) ideas become attractive for organisations when they are followed and implemented by similar organisations that are perceived to be successful. Correspondingly, the material of the research indicates that the companies of the sector in question have distinguished employer branding as an effective practice to compete with the other companies in their sector. For example, when one of the HR professional was asked about the company participating in the “Best Workplaces Hellas” contest, that respondent mentioned:

“The company wanted to compete , to show the image that it has inside and outside of the company, to put it on the table with the other companies, and to take a position among them through a procedure that is carried out by an official organisation” (HRP4)

Moreover, the companies are informed about the practices that other companies implement through studies and research either inside Greece or in other countries, and thus aim to imitate success recipes coming from other settings. As one of the respondents mentioned:

“HRM was not born in Greece and so we import practices from other places and this means that there will be a small delay for some companies. You will find employer branding in its structured form mostly in multinationals and large companies.” (HRP5)

This corresponds with Myloni et al (2004) who compared the Greek companies and the subsidiaries of MNCs and found out that the latter implemented some practices in a more structured way due to the connections with the parent company. Moreover, they expected these differences to be found more frequently in smaller companies.

According to Sahlin-Andersson (1996) the difference between the current situation of a company and the desired one constitutes a problem for organisational actors. In the case of the companies researched in this study, employer branding is described by its editors (i.e. the HR managers and CEOs) as a way to improve their competitive position in their industry and, thus, as a solution to the problems raised by the financial crisis. In other words, employer branding is considered as one of the practices that will place them among the successful companies. These editors are not passively adopting employer branding but they are actively transforming the concept, and the process of translation begins.

Employer branding for some of the companies researched is perceived of more as a series of practices that promote their pre-existing good working conditions than a corporate strategy in the sense of coordinated execution of plans with specified goals. The quality of a company's employer brand is perceived as the result of having a good working environment and high levels of employee satisfaction and the practices to achieve them have been implemented by the companies before employer branding was introduced to them.

"It was always very important to retain our employees and in that sense employer branding has always been important for us, it is just that the last years we are also trying to show it to the world" (HRP5)

According to the interviewees, when employer branding fell into their attention (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996) they saw an opportunity to communicate this good working environment to other audiences as well (analysed below). In other words, employer branding was translated as the re packaging of older practices and the employees the *"ambassadors of the company's fame"* (HRP3) and the *"best way to advertise that you are a good employer"* (HRP2). This is in line with Martin (2009) who has proposed that the organisational image is influenced by the quality of the employment relations as a result of HR practices.

Czarniawska and Joerges (1996) claim that the managers of companies that are in crisis "look for salvation" (p.28). In the case of the companies investigated, when they found themselves operating in the turbulent environment of the financial crisis, a strong employer brand became even more necessary. Nevertheless, the prerequisites for a company to be considered a good employer have changed since the beginning of the crisis and, as a consequence, so has the content of employer branding. Due to the financial crisis, being a good employer is associated

with stability and security in terms of employees keeping their positions and being paid as agreed. For example, one HR professional has stated in the mass media that:

“If I was writing down my thoughts five years ago about what is the best working environment and how to achieve it I would probably describe initiatives such as events, day trips and corporate celebrations of our successes.” (Trimpou, 2014, p.111)

While another one that was interviewed for the current study mentioned that:

“The most basic thing in these times that we live in is that we get paid in time, every month; and that we have our health insurance as we used to, and these are important things in times of crisis. And we have not fired anyone.” (HRP2)

In correspondence with Martin et al (2011) and as analysed more in detail below, the main goals of employer branding in the Greek companies during the crisis are to increase the motivation of the employees, and to improve the corporate reputation to their customers and suppliers. The need to attract prospective employees is not a priority due to the high levels of job offer and the low levels of turnover; nevertheless it is considered one of the goals regarding some categories of employees.

Objectification

According to Czarniawska and Joerges (1996) the basic way to objectify an idea is to turn it into a linguistic artefact such as a label, and use it repetitively. The way the companies investigated have labelled employer branding, though, varies. In their everyday operations, some of the companies use the international term employer branding while others use elements of the concept such as “attraction of employees” or “employer identity”; in essence they all describe the same idea, although for some the term employer branding is related more to the external image of the company as an employer.

These terms are used when the organisational actors (mainly HR managers, corporate communications managers, and CEOs) act as the editors of employer branding and create what Czarniawska and Joerges (1996) call “plans of action”. As indicated by the respondents although employer branding is not embedded to the everyday functions of the company, they are conducting occasionally meetings during which decisions are taken for activities that will promote the employer brand of the company. However, there are variations regarding these decision-making processes as well. For example, one of the respondents claimed that the company participated in the “Best Workplaces Hellas” contest because another HR

professional in the same company was '*more active and interested in these things*' (HRP3); another participant claimed that it was the CEO of the company that proposed the participation in the same contest; finally, another participant mentioned that it was the HR department collaborating with the Communications department that decided the participation in the contest and that they are all aligned to the same goal which is to show that the company has a strong employer brand. However, some of the respondents assign the label of employer branding to activities that are related to the external aspect of employer branding. On the contrary, the decision-making processes regarding the internal environment of the company are embedded in the everyday operations of the companies but frequently are not termed as parts of employer branding. Nevertheless, the respondents acknowledged that the practices that aim at creating a positive working environment have a positive impact on the employer brand as well, and therefore, they are incorporated in the current analysis as employer branding practices.

Enactment

The enactment of employer branding comprises of a number of activities inside and outside of the company. Although these are presented below separately for each group that employer branding is targeted to, a general description that derives from all sources of research data is provided here. The main external employer branding activities of the companies are the corporate websites, their participation in Greek and European “Best employers” or “Best Workplaces Hellas” contests, and the participation of the companies to career events where they come in contact mainly with University students and young professionals. The main internal employer branding activities, although not assigned in all cases with the label as such, are training and development programs for the employees, benefits and events with symbolic meanings such as celebrations, and support of the employees to cope with the economic recession if possible.

4.2 The influence of the institutional logics

Employees

The translation of the internal employer branding in Greece is influenced by two institutional logics. On the one hand, the market institutional logic (Goodrick & Reay, 2011) indicates that the motives of the corporate strategies are to remain competitive. On the other hand, the family institutional logic (Thornton & Ocasio, 1999) is associated with values such as trust,

loyalty and closeness and influences the structure and strategies in a variety of organisations (Fairclough & Micelotta, 2013). Retaining the current employees by mobilizing these two institutional logics has become a priority for the implementation during the crisis and this corresponds with Martin et al (2011) who stated that there is a shift of the employer branding purposes from attracting new employees towards retaining the existing ones.

The retainment of the employees remained important during the crisis, meaning that even though there is increased job supply companies try to avoid the recruitment costs or the risk of losing competence. Moreover, the companies aim at increasing the levels of employee engagement so as to maintain or improve their performance. Therefore, the companies aim at improving their position in terms of competitiveness with the other companies in their industry, and, thus, the translation of the internal employer branding regarding its is influenced by the market logic (Goodrick & Reay, 2011).

Nevertheless, the material of the research indicates that the institutional logic of family has influenced how employer branding is communicated to the employees. In other words, the institutional logic of family shaped the symbolic meanings that companies aim at infusing their working environment with. Out of all the words that are related to values and beliefs, the word *family* has been one of the most frequently found in the research material. According to Fairclough and Micelotta (2013) the notion of the family is used even by the non-family owned companies in a metaphorical way to depict the objective of each company to create a “quasi-family” where its members are expected to be trustworthy, supportive and loyal to each other. This influence is especially observable in settings where the concept of family is strong and it is associated with culture and religion (idem) such as Greece (Myloni et al, 2004).

In the companies investigated, the participants emphasised that the creation of a family-like relationship with their employees has been one of their primary concerns since the foundation of the companies. When the idea of employer branding was introduced into the companies, the familial logic became one of the parts of the new strategy. Internal employer branding was translated as the creation of a good working environment that would be based on the values of family. This way the new idea gained positive connotations that were essential for its enactment (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996). The new idea was presented as positive regarding its results as its purpose was to retain the employees and attract new ones. Additionally,

retaining the employees remained important during the crisis, meaning that even though there is increased job supply companies try to avoid the recruitment costs or the risk of losing competence. This corresponds with Martin et al (2011) who stated that there is a shift of the employer branding purposes towards retaining the existing employees.

As the circumstances changed during the financial crisis the idea of employer branding was re-examined into the new context. As one HR professional mentioned in the mass media:

“Our first concern is to maintain the working positions, something that we have managed so far, despite the difficult economic situation” (VIMA, 2013, p.4)

Therefore, the family institutional logic became more prevalent and more intensely applied by companies in their efforts to maintain the positive working environment they had built the previous years. The companies' efforts to remain an employer of choice for their employees in many cases was a challenging task because they passed through adverse and demanding conditions such as wage reductions, downsizing processes, strikes, mergers and acquisitions. In these circumstances the working climate and the relationships based on the notion of family counterpointed the negative climate and were used mainly to keep the motivation and morale of the employees.

For example, one of the respondents explained that the company managed to maintain the support of the employees during the times that the company was delaying to pay their wages because *“the company had been a good employer for many years in the past”* (HRP1). The established trust and reciprocity between the company and the employees resulted in avoiding the conflict between them. In response, the leadership of the company decided that there would not be any wage reductions and that at least the basic benefits (for example health care insurance) would be maintained.

Another example is that of a major company that was privatised during the crisis. As found in the mass media, the employees of the company were against the privatization and there were many reactions before and after the closing of the agreement. In order to gain the trust of the employees, the CEO of the company acknowledged publicly the importance of the employees for the value of the company and referred to them as a new family.

The family institutional logic plays a prevalent role in the way the concept of the internal employer branding is enacted. Although not all of the activities described below are fully

incorporated and labelled employer branding by the HR managers that are responsible, the editors according to Sahlin-Andersson (1996), they are however planned so as to retain and motivate the employees, and therefore they are included in this analysis.

The companies have incorporated these practices in their everyday operations. To begin with, training and development are mentioned as positive attributes of the working environments in many corporate websites. The HR managers who were interviewed claimed that the companies express the need for the continuous development of their employees, not only to improve their performance in the strict sense but also to retain them. This practice applies both in the cases that an employee desires to continue the education independently and also in the design and realization of educational seminars inside the company. This practice is connected to the crisis as well because, as one HR manager stated in an interview found in the mass media, the employees frequently cannot bear the cost of life-long learning especially during the financial crisis. In that sense, companies motivate their employees by showing support and solidarity in their efforts for development.

Although expressed with the mobilisation of the family logic, the attention that the companies pay to the training and development of the employees is motivated by the market logic (Goodrick & Reay, 2011). The purpose of the companies is to develop an engaged and trained workforce not only as a response to the challenges of the financial crisis but also to ensure the success of the company when the context will change again. As mentioned by an HR professional in the mass media:

“We believe that the crisis will finish one day and the growth will come back again and for that reason the people that will further develop the company must be prepared”

(SBC TV, 2012 November 6)

This finding contrasts to some extent the findings of Wicramasinghe and Perera (2012) who concluded that training and development investments were reduced in a context of crisis, although this contrast may be related to the lack of data from smaller companies in the current study, as analysed in the study's limitations.

In the case of the privatised company mentioned above, for example, the material from the mass media showed that the new owners gained the trust of the employees through investments such as the creation of an ‘academy’ that would further develop the existing employees and attract new talents. Another example found in the mass media is a company

that implements short-term job rotation not only to train the employees but also to keep them interested in the company.

Another practice that is promoted to the websites and, according to the interviewees, aims at the employees feeling a part of the family is them being updated for all the activities and the news of the company. For example, employees may be offered samples of a new product that the company is about to launch in the market so as to feel included and have an opinion about it. A more everyday practice is sending internal newsletters with updates about the company in general, or regular meetings between the CEO and the employees of the company.

Wicramasinghe and Perera (2012) found that the practice of informing the employees about the corporate news, either internal or external, was one of the factors that kept the levels of employee happiness to positive levels. As one of the interviewees of the current study mentioned:

“The employees must be informed about the company first and not to hear the news from the outside of the company” (HRP3)

In order to enhance the feeling of belonging to the metaphorical family of the company some companies proceed to occasional activities. For example, companies plan each year traditional events such as Christmas celebrations during which all employees and the owners of the company are gathered. Moreover, the companies frequently provide benefits related to the family of each employee such as a bonus if an employee's child is admitted to the University or more days of leave in the case of an employee's relative being sick. This way *“the families of the employees are included in the big family of the company”* (HRP2) and this way the high level of family collectivism in Greece is satisfied (Myloni et al, 2004).

To sum up, as Brenčič, Pfajfar and Rašković (2012) suggested, the companies put efforts through various practices to establish strong and reliable relationships with their employees to address the lack of trust that is created by the financial crisis. This way, they aim not only to retain the current employees but also to improve the corporate reputation from the inside (Martin, 2009).

Consumers

Employer branding in the companies investigated is not only targeted towards their current and potential employees but it is also associated with other audiences. One of these audiences

is the companies' customers but, as the research focuses on the Food and Beverages sector, their customers is not a segment of the market but rather it is considered as the society as a whole. In this sense, the goals and results of employer branding are linked with the corporate brand and the reputation of the company (Martin, 2009; Martin et al, 2011; Raithel et al, 2004).

The translation of employer branding that is addressed to the product consumers is influenced by the community institutional logic which is related to the notions of common identity and interests (Lee & Lounsbury, 2015) and by the market logic which is related to the purpose of the companies to gain a competitive advantage (Goodrick & Reay, 2011). The relationship between a company's employer brand and the consumers has three aspects that are connected between them and are influenced by the financial crisis.

The first aspect is that the quality of the product is associated with the quality of the employer brand. As described in the corporate websites, offering a good quality product to the market is an attribute of a company that is taking into consideration the well-being of its customers and the society in total. According to the participants, this image of the company further enhances its employer brand because people would be proud of to work for. As one of the participants stated:

"We contribute to the society the benefits that our product is offering, and I believe that a satisfied customer from a high quality product is inspired to work for that product" (HRP4)

The second aspect is related to the quality of the employer brand that affects the sales of the product. In other words, employer branding is translated as a concept that plays a decisive role in the corporate brand itself and a part of the company's reputation and success.

According to another respondent:

'It is in our culture that if we know that a company is not treating the employees right we do not want the product... we are a small society, even if you are a bad employer and you want to hide you simply cannot, the employees will tell their families and so on.' (HRP3)

When the respondents were asked to comment upon the employer branding of other companies in their sector, most of them stated that some companies proceeded to wage reductions by using the financial crisis as an excuse but without facing severe financial problems themselves. However, according to the interviewees, these companies received a negative publicity for these decisions and their consumer brand was negatively affected.

The third aspect is that the employer brand is associated with the presence in the local job market in numerical terms (i.e. how many employees they have). Especially since the beginning of the financial crisis, there is a tendency in the Greek society to support the companies that operate locally in contrast with those that have relocated for example some of their plants to neighbour countries where the wages are lower. These companies are considered unsupportive of the local economy and job market and therefore their employer brand and the brand of the product itself lose their value to a significant degree. For example, as found in the mass media material, when one company in the Beverages sector decided to relocate one of its plants in another country, the employees of the company, at that time on strike, urged the consumers to boycott against the company's products, which to a certain degree was realized (VIMA, 2014). On the contrary, as the respondents explained, the companies that keep their facilities inside the country frequently follow the logic of "support us, to support you" in their marketing or employer branding messages towards the public. Moreover, as found in some corporate websites, the companies that are large in terms of employment are promoted as actors that improve the economic life of the local community. For example, as found in one corporate website:

"The company has approximately 400 permanent and seasonal employees, becoming this way the largest employer in the region of Epirus and contributing with a determining manner to the economic life of the region."(www.dodoni.eu)

Finally, the material indicates that the companies promote their employer brands to the consumers so as to improve their corporate reputation, identified as a practice also by Martin et al (2011). This way the companies enhance their corporate brand and have the possibility to gain a competitive advantage among the other companies in the industry. Therefore, as their motives are related to the competition, the translation of employer branding that is targeted towards the consumers is also influenced by the market logic (Goodrick & Reay, 2011).

Suppliers

One of the audiences of employer branding are the suppliers of the companies which in the case of the Food and Beverages sector are mainly individuals, associations, groups, or companies who are working in agriculture and sell their raw material to the Food and Beverages manufacturing companies. Employer branding that is targeted to this audience is translated (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996) through the community logic (Lee & Lounsbury,

2015) and the market logic (Goodrick & Reay, 2011) as it is considered one of the elements of the company's image to the suppliers and an important factor for their collaboration.

As explained by the respondents, the instability of the economy and the lack of cash flow in the Greek market have created a lack of trust in the collaboration of the companies with their suppliers as the companies were unable to respond to their financial responsibilities towards the suppliers and debt was created. The companies aim at improving their reputation regarding their reliability and trustworthiness and also aim at being in a privileged position in the market regarding the relationships with the suppliers in comparison with their competitors. This difference between their current position and the desired one is a problem that employer branding is aiming to solve (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996). In that sense, the translation of employer branding regarding the suppliers is driven by the market logic. In other words, as indicated by Martin et al (2011) employer branding is one of the elements of the corporate reputation to the key stakeholders, including the suppliers. As one of the respondents emphasized:

“One of the benefits of having the reputation of a good employer is that your suppliers feel safe with you; they know that they will get their money.”(HRP4)

The efforts that the companies are putting to be trustworthy for their suppliers are characterised by the community logic (Lee & Lounsbury, 2015) as they share common interests and expectations and are in many cases geographically located at the same region, and one of these efforts is having the image of a good employer. Some of the companies investigated mention in their websites that they contribute to the local economies in various ways, for example by being good employers and by supporting the local producers with various programs.

Other occasions in which employer branding is enacted regarding the suppliers are cases of companies that lack legitimacy in the consciousness of local communities. For example, the company that was privatised (mentioned above) is one of the biggest manufacturers of dairy products. As found in the mass media, employer branding was used among others for the privatisation and the new foreign ownership to be legitimised in the local community (Pournara, 2015). The suppliers also were in conflict with the company because the latter could not respond in time to its economic responsibilities due to the lack of cash flow. The strategy of the company to reverse this situation was a mix of communication with the local

farmers and investments on the training and development of the employees. As mentioned in the mass media, it was the combination of these activities that convinced the employees, the farmers that were the suppliers of the company, and the local community that the foreign investors guaranteed the future of the company.

Despite the fact that employer branding is targeted to the suppliers of the company using the community logic, the goals of this relationship are set by the market logic (Goodrick & Reay, 2011). In other words, the activities to improve the corporate reputation to achieve more robust relationships with the suppliers indicates that the goal of the company is to be more competitive in the industry in which it operates. For example, one of the respondents mentioned:

“Certainly when you have a good fame as an employer you have better deals with the suppliers, and you do not need to negotiate that much” (HRP3)

Therefore the translation and enactment of employer branding in this case are driven by the market logic as well.

Finally, as Raithel et al (2010) indicated a company has ‘multiple reputations’ because different stakeholders assess a company according to their own interests and based on specific parameters as in this case is trustworthiness. Therefore for the suppliers of the companies, employer branding becomes one of the criteria through which the company’s reputation is evaluated especially during the financial crisis.

Potential employees

According to the participants of the study, attracting new employees is not one of their priorities due to high levels of unemployment, low turnover rates, and the subsequent increase of the job supply. This finding corresponds with Martin et al (2011) who claimed that in the countries affected by the financial crisis attracting new talents is no longer the main goal of employer branding, in contrast with the previous decades.

However, some companies support that employer branding regarding this audience should not be discontinued during the crisis because a company should always strive to be an employer of choice. Their goal is to be able to cover their occasional or future staffing needs quickly and effectively in terms of finding the best candidate for a position. The importance of finding the best possible candidate for a position is also described as a consequence of the

crisis because companies recruit much fewer employees than they used to. Therefore, as one of the respondents mentioned:

“For example, I am going to hire only one person. At least, I want that person to be the best choice” (HRP5)

The translation of employer branding (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996) regarding this audience is influenced by the market logic; the goal is to be cost and time effective when there are working positions available, to be competitive towards the other companies by being the most attractive employers in the labour market, and the success is determined by the preferences of the job applicants (Goodrick & Reay, 2011).

A number of companies design and realize activities to increase their attractiveness as employers. Nevertheless, besides the corporate websites, the enactment of employer branding to this audience is characterized by sporadic activities such as the participation in career events or “Best employer” and “Best Workplace” contests. According to the interviews of HR professionals found in the mass media, the purpose of participating in the career events is to communicate with potential employees, to create the image of an extrovert employer, and to have a more personalized presence as employers in the job market. Moreover, some other companies perform activities to improve their working environment and although attracting new employees may not be their primary goal, they consider that the promotion of these activities has a positive impact on the external aspect of employer branding as well. When asked about the implementation of international standards of performance measurement in the company, an HR professional answered in the mass media:

“It is good to be known [that we are following the standards], because you become attractive for many good job applicants. This is legitimate and it is how the market works”

(SBC TV, 2012, July 17)

However, the research material suggests that it is not only the market logic that drives the translation of employer branding but there are some elements of the community logic as well (Lee & Lounsbury, 2015). To begin with, as indicated by some of the interviewees and as found in the mass media, during the career events the HR professionals that are representing each company also offer advice to young professionals, for example on how to be prepared for a job interview. Some of the companies investigated also participate in the volunteering “job pairs” program where an employee from one company acts as a mentor for a job-seeking

student. Moreover, the companies frequently provide feedback on the resumes of the job applicants that are not finally hired so as to facilitate their job-seeking efforts.

Finally, one of the respondents mentioned that some HR professionals experience feelings of guilt each time they reject a job applicant for a position because they are aware of the high unemployment and the obstacles it creates. Another one expressed the wish that companies would be able to hire more young professionals to reduce the number of unemployed. All the above mentioned examples show that it is not only the market logic that drives the translation of employer branding but there are some elements of the community logic as well (Lee & Lounsbury, 2015).

5. Discussion and conclusions

The findings of this research have illustrated how the understanding and practice of employer branding are not context-free but rather they are influenced by specific circumstances. In the specific case, the focus has been employer branding in Greece during the financial crisis. In order to explore employer branding in this setting two research questions have been explored:

- How is employer branding conceptualized by HR professionals in Greece?
- How does the context influence the conceptualization and practice of employer branding?

In this section, these two research questions are addressed and the conclusions of the study are provided along with its theoretical and practical contributions. Finally, the limitations of the study and their relevance to the conclusions of the study are explained, along with implications for future research.

5.1 The conceptualisation of employer branding in Greece and the influence of the context

Employer branding in most of the Greek companies examined by this study is not fully institutionalized. There are many variations of the degree to which employer branding is embedded in the everyday function of the companies or as a part of their priorities and strategic initiatives. Some of these companies, mainly large and MNCs strategically design and implement employer branding, some companies choose to perform specific activities to develop and promote their employer brand, and a number of companies do not show their presence as employers externally. This variation is prevalent by the examination of the corporate websites where some companies present their working environment analytically

while others do not make any reference and by the lack of attention in the mass media. Therefore, the image of how employer branding was understood before the financial crisis is difficult to be clearly described or compared with the present situation as there is a lack of longitudinal data in the mass media, and as mentioned in the findings, it is not clear by the interview material when exactly employer branding was introduced in the companies.

Nevertheless, what is clear regarding the operation of some of the companies before the introduction of employer branding is that they had put efforts to become good employers and perceived as such by their employees. When the considerations regarding the quality of their employer brand internally and externally of the company became an issue, the promotion of the positive working environment through the word-of-mouth messages of the engaged employees became the most important channel of communicating the employer brand to other stakeholders of the company.

This need to promote the employer brand to various stakeholders of the company has become prevalent during the financial crisis as the demands of various actors (employees, consumers, suppliers) and the situation of the labour market have changed. Employer branding is practiced as a response to these challenges and therefore there is a shift in its goals and the groups that it targets. To begin with, the goal of employer branding to attract new employees proposed in various studies (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004) is not corresponding to the present situation because the needs of the companies to hire new employees are relatively low. Employer branding regarding this group is practiced to some extent, but this is mostly related to occasional or future needs of the companies. Moreover, the need to motivate and retain the employees is crucial for most of the companies as a way to respond to the pressures imposed by the economic recession. Finally, employer branding is perceived as a part of the reputation management of a company as the image of a good employer facilitates their efforts to promote the brands of their products, gain the trust of their suppliers, and further engage the employees.

Another contextual influence on employer branding is the norms, values, and beliefs found in the Greek society which are used as guides to the way employer branding is implemented towards the various groups mentioned above. Especially during the financial crisis, the demands of these groups had to be matched with an appropriate way to be responded meaning that the characteristics of the Greek society were taken into consideration. The attribute of the

high in-group collectivism (Myloni et al, 2004) influences to a significant extent the practice of employer branding both internally and externally of the company. In other words, the institutional logics of family and community become even more influential in times of crisis.

5.2 Contributions of the study

Drawing from Waldorff (2013) this study contributes theoretically to the employer branding studies by showing how employer branding can be understood by combining the concept of translation with the institutional logics perspective (Figure 2). On the one hand, the concept of translation enabled the description of how employer branding was translated, materialized, and enacted in the Greek companies. On the other hand, the institutional logics perspective showed how the mobilization of different institutional logics by organisational actors for each of the audiences of employer branding resulted in a local translation and enactment of the employer branding model.

Another theoretical contribution of the study is that the application of non-market logics such as the family and the community logics to a corporate action has been described. More specifically, Fairclough and Micelotta (2013) claim that the influence of the family logic in non-family owned companies has not been adequately researched in the literature. Similarly, Lee and Lounsbury (2015) support that the research on the community logic is limited on the influence that the logic has on communities that are bounded by geographical terms. The study has shown how the logics of family and community have been valuable for the organisational actors of the industry investigated (HR managers, Communication managers, and CEOs) that acted as editors (Sahlin-Andersson, 1996) of employer branding when the latter was addressed to the employees, the customers, and the suppliers of their companies.

Not only the societal level institutional logics of family, community, and market are identified in the conceptualisation and practice of employer branding in Greece but the way they collectively influence the corporate practice is also shown (Figure 2). Therefore, the third theoretical contribution of the study is the support of the constellations of logics concept (Goodrick and Reay, 2011). Even though these logics coexist, their influence to the practice of employer branding towards each of the four audiences varies. The organisational actors that translate employer branding (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996) in the Greek companies respond to the diverse expectations (due to the cultural background and the financial crisis) of the different audiences (Voronov et al, 2013). Therefore, this study shows how the

constellation of the family, community, and market logic is important for the possibility to promote the employer brand to the different audiences.

The study contributes to the field of employer branding in two ways. The first one is that the study shows how the perception and implementation of employer branding are related to the context in which a company or industry operates. This finding of the study corresponds with the gap in the literature identified by Aggerholm et al (2011) that emphasized on the new demands imposed on employer branding due to various societal level changes such as an economic recession. The second contribution to the field of employer branding is that a depiction of how it is practiced in existing companies is provided. This illustration of reality is in contrast with the majority of the studies on employer branding that offer a normative perspective and focus on how employer branding should be practiced.

This illustration of how employer branding is understood and practiced in a real-life setting constitutes the study's contribution to the knowledge of the HRM and employer branding practitioners as well. First of all, this study is useful for HRM practitioners in Greece where HRM is underexplored (Myloni et al, 2004), and especially for employer branding practitioners in Greece where the concept is not institutionalized and the insights provided by this study may be useful to comprehend its current status more in-depth. One implication for HRM professionals is that the demands for their role increase due to the fact that employer branding is an important part of the corporate reputation and therefore has as target groups not only the employees (current and potential) but also the consumers and the suppliers of the companies. This implies that the financial crisis influences the role of the HR professionals because they cannot focus only on their activities, but rather they need to cooperate more closely with practitioners from other departments such as the Marketing and the Communications departments. Finally, even though there are generalisability issues regarding the findings of a qualitative study (Bryman, 2008), the findings of this study are useful for practitioners in similar settings as that in Greece during the financial crisis.

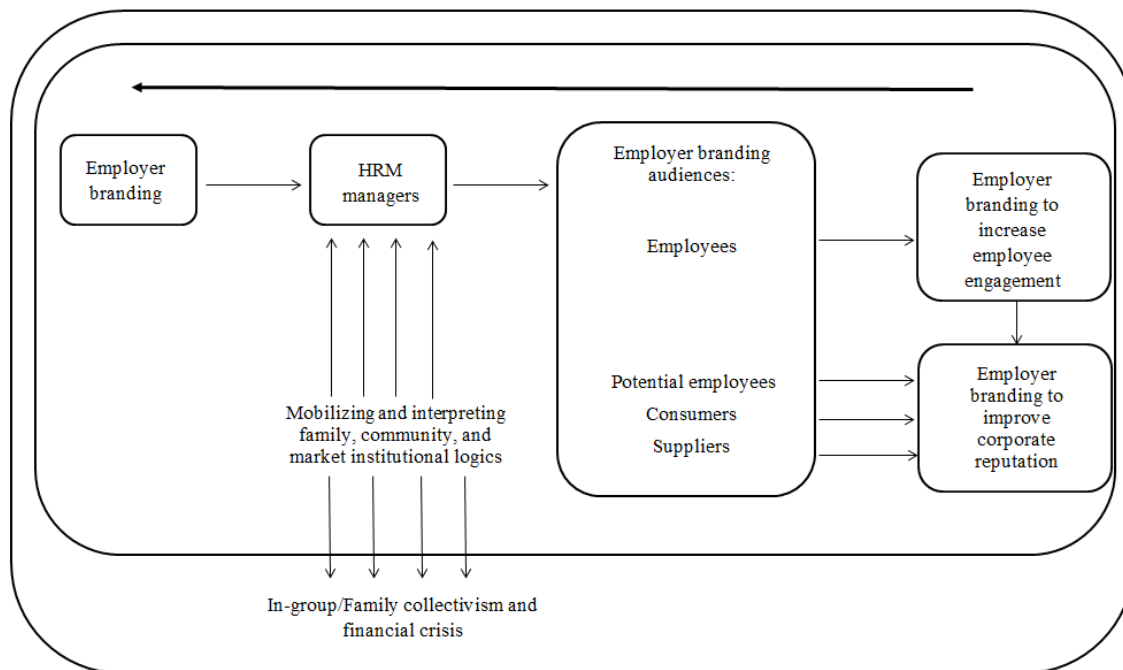


Figure 2. Translation model-actors translating an organisational concept into organisational innovation mobilizing constellations of institutional logics. (Adapted from Waldorff, 2013, p.231).

5.3 Conclusions of the study

Aggerholm et al (2011) have disapproved the previous conceptualizations of employer branding that focus on the promoting messages of the employer brand that the companies send to their current and potential employees in order to become attractive employers. The authors argued that employer branding has more potential for the development of an organisation if it is perceived as a dialogue between the goals of the company and the needs of its stakeholders in order to create value for the company. Therefore, when societal changes occur and the needs of the stakeholders change employer branding must adapt accordingly.

Based on the example of Greece during the financial crisis, it can be concluded that the ongoing translation process (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996) of employer branding is influenced as the context changes. Since the beginning of the crisis employer branding is implemented mainly as a response to the shift of the stakeholder's needs due to the financial crisis. Employer branding adapted to the new circumstances in two ways. The first one is that the priority of employer branding became the retainment and motivation of the current employees instead of the attraction of new ones. The second one is that two more groups were

added to the audiences of employer branding, namely the customers and the suppliers of the company. In other words, the goals of employer branding are to increase the employee engagement that is influenced by the effects of the financial crisis and, to some extent through the employee engagement, to improve the reputation of the company and gain the support and trust of the consumers and suppliers (Figure 2). This conclusion is in line with the definition of employer branding by Martin et al (2011) who stated that employer brand is promoted by the employees and is linked to the corporate reputation to the key stakeholders. Moreover, the way employer branding was adapted to the changes is by the mobilization of a mix of principles, values and beliefs found in the Greek society, deriving from the high in-group/family collectivism (Myloni et al, 2004), and by addressing them to the different target groups.

Finally, the traditional definition of employer branding as a strategy to attract, retain and motivate employees has been challenged to some degree because it became evident that it applies under specific circumstances as is the time of prosperity. In other words, employer branding can include more actors in the company and can be addressed to all stakeholders. Thus, the previous definitions are narrow, while this study has shown that employer branding can play a broader role in the performance of the company as an important element of the corporate reputation.

5.4 Limitations and future research

The study has some limitations and these can offer directions for future research as described below. The first limitation is that the results of the study are not generalisable or replicable due to the fact that the study is based on a limited amount of interviews. Another reason for this limitation is that the study follows a qualitative approach, meaning that in qualitative studies the subjectivity of the results is in most cases an issue as they reflect the researcher's beliefs, values, and perceptions (Bryman, 2008). Moreover, the study focuses to one industry located in one country and therefore the findings are associated with the specific case and context during a specific historical time that is during the financial crisis. In that sense, the findings of this study are not appropriate to characterise employer branding in another country or sector. Nevertheless, a thick description of the research methods and the findings have been provided to enable some reflections to similar settings as well.

A second limitation of the study is that the findings regarding the practice of employer branding are not generated through observations in companies but they reflect mainly the managers' interpretations of how employer branding is practiced. In order to compensate for this constraint, the method of data triangulation was chosen as a research tactic to study the practice of employer branding as, for example, the corporate websites are one of the channels through which the companies promote their employer brand (ALBA, 2014) and, thus, a more complete view has been provided.

The third limitation of the study derives from the lack of interviews from HR managers in small companies (in terms of number of employees). The inclusion of these companies to the study would provide further insights on the variation of the employer branding implementation among Greek companies and therefore the findings would be more holistic regarding the sector. This limitation could be the inspiration for a future study that would incorporate small companies aiming either to examine the whole Food and Beverages sector either to compare the small and larger companies regarding their employer branding.

Additionally, when the financial situation in Greece will be normalized, future research could evaluate what was the role of HRM practices such as employer branding as described above to the efforts of the companies to overcome the challenges of the financial crisis. More specifically, future studies could explore how has the implementation of employer branding practices to secure and increase employee engagement and improve the corporate reputation contributed to the survival and success of the companies during the financial crisis. Similarly, future studies could examine which HRM practices adopted during the financial crisis would be maintained and which would be abandoned, affecting in this sense the HRM profession.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Interview guide

Demographic questions

1. What is your position in the company?
2. How long have you been employed in the company?

Questions on employer branding

3. What does employer branding mean for your company?
4. According to your opinion, which are the benefits of being an attractive employer for your company?
5. Why and when your company initially started promoting its employer brand?
6. What is the position that employer branding has among the other strategies in your company?
7. Which are the activities that are included in the employer branding of your company?
8. Who is responsible for employer branding in your company?
9. What is the decision-making process regarding employer branding in your company?
10. Who would you like to have a positive opinion for your company as an employer?
11. Which are the problems that the financial crisis has created to you regarding your employer brand?
12. How do you handle these problems?
13. Which are the problems that the financial crisis has created in your industry regarding the employer branding?
14. How would you commend how other companies in your industry are implementing employer branding?
15. Do you believe that the financial crisis has created opportunities for your employer brand?

Appendix 2

Corporate websites analysed in the study

Athenian Brewery	http://www.athenianbrewery.gr/oi-anthrwpoi-mas/ergasiako-perivallon/
Barba Stathis	http://www.barbastathis.com/el/etairia/etairia.html
Creta farms	http://www.cretafarms.gr/en/group/our-people/
Dodoni	http://www.dodoni.eu/el/ypeythynotita
Elbisco	http://www.elbisco.gr/?page=Our_people
Evrofarma	http://evrofarma.gr/en/company/people
Fage	http://greece.fage.eu/company/me-mia-matia
Haitoglou	http://www.haitogloubros.com/el/history.htm
Ion	http://www.ion.gr/the-values.html
Jotis	http://www.jotis.gr/Content.php?PageId=9&Language=el
Karamolegos	http://karamolegos-bkr.gr/en/company/our-people/
Krikri	http://www.krikri.gr/
Melissa	http://www.melissa.gr/en/corporate-social-responsibility/people/
Mevgal	http://www.mevgal.gr/frontend/articles.php?cid=103&header_cat=68
Mimikos	www.mimikos.gr
Minerva	http://www.minerva.com.gr/kariera/ekpedefsi/
Nestle	http://www.nestle.gr/jobs/documents/index.html
Olympos	http://olympus.gr/etaireia/oi-aksies-mas/
Optima	http://www.optima.gr/eteria/anthropino-dinamiko/
Papadopoulou	http://papadopoulou.gr/company/human-resources
Pepsico	http://www.pepsico-ivi.gr/page.aspx?itemID=SPG11
Pindos	http://www.pindos-apsi.gr/content/istoriko-9
Viki	http://www.viki.gr/information

Appendix 3

Mass media material sources

Newspaper articles

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Appendix 4

List of companies and interviewees with interview codes

Company	Industry	Position	Participation	Code
Company A	Food	HR Director	Questionnaire	HRP1
Company B	Food	HR Director	Interview	HRP2
Company C	Food	Recruiter	Interview	HRP3
Company D	Food	HR Director	Interview	HRP4
Company E	Beverages	Recruiter	Interview	HRP5